

APPENDIX F SUMMARY OF ELMENDORF AFB HISTORIC SETTING

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PALEO ARCTIC PERIOD (10,000 – 6,000 BP)

During the Pleistocene, massive continental ice sheets consumed a portion of the world's water supply lowering sea levels as much as 400 feet and exposing a land bridge between northeastern Asia and Alaska known as Beringia (Fagan). At the same time, northern and central Alaska experienced less glaciation than much of North America (National Park Service [NPS] 2005a). Alaska's interior, as well as Beringia, was a relatively ice-free region with steppe tundra vegetation that supported mammoth, musk ox, giant beaver, mastodon, and sloth. It is by way of Beringia and through the ice-free region that North America was likely first populated. There is also good evidence to suggest that populations also moved into North America along a coastal route. The first inhabitants of the region were technologically similar to contemporary northeast Asian populations and are commonly referred to as the Paleoarctic or Siberian-American Paleoarctic Tradition. They used a stone tool technology based on small blades, small blade cores, and composite tools, and were widespread through Alaska from 6000 to 10,000 before present (BP). While fluted projectile points credited to Paleoindian populations (Clovis, Folsom) have been found in Alaska, they have not been dated firmly enough to mark the migration or diffusion of the technology into the region (NPS 2005a).

ARCHAIC PERIOD (6000 - 1800 BP)

The Northern Archaic Tradition seems to be related to the Archaic cultures of the boreal forest south and east of Alaska. This group or groups appeared around 6000 BP across a wide area of Alaska (NPS 2005a). Some of the sites include microblade technology and tabular microcores. The presence or absence of this earlier technology has led to varying interpretations of the origins and roles of the Northern Archaic people. It has been identified both as an interior tradition resulting from people following the expanding boreal forest northward during a climatic warming period and displacing local descendants of Paleoarctic groups, and as a technological diffusion that spread from the boreal forests northward and westward.

LATE PREHISTORIC/PROTOHISTORIC PERIOD (CA. 1800 TO 150 BP)

During this time, the indigenous inhabitants of Alaska specialized toward subsistence patterns suitable to the various available environments. In interior Alaska, inhabitants have been characterized as primarily caribou hunters, oriented toward upland, treeless areas (NPS 2005a).

Southwestern Alaska is an area of Pacific Eskimo co-traditions stretching from the Alaska Peninsula west of Kodiak Island to the Copper River delta on the Gulf of Alaska. In late prehistoric times, the population of this region fell into two major linguistic divisions: Aleutian and Eskimoan. The dividing line between the two groups was the Alaska Peninsula. Both groups shared traits based on their common subsistence strategies as marine hunters and their common roots as Eskaleut peoples.

At the time of European contact, the coast of Alaska north of the Alaska Peninsula was occupied by people adapted to life along winter ice-bound coasts. They spoke two distinct Eskimoan languages. The Aleuts, whose language was related to Eskimoan, inhabited the region from the

tip of the Alaska Peninsula, westward throughout the Aleutian Islands. They practiced open-water hunting and fishing. The Alaskan interior was home to broadly adapted hunters and fishers of the boreal forest. Several distinct languages were spoken by these people, all part of the Athabaskan family of languages (NPS 2005a).

RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN PERIODS (A.D. 1700 TO 1940)

In 1741, Danish explorer Vitus Bering's Russian expedition visited Alaska, initiating the wholesale harvest of sea otter pelts. The Russian American Company was granted sole trading rights in America in 1799, and the fur harvest increased in the early 1800s under the leadership of Alexander Baranov. Russian settlements were established at Sitka (New Archangel), the Russian capitol in America, and at other locations throughout the region in the early 1800s. Gold was discovered by Russian prospectors on the Kenai Peninsula in 1849.

Following attacks on Russian settlements by native groups, rising costs of administering the territory, and the collapse of the fur trade, Russia sold Alaska to the U.S. in 1867 for \$7.2 million. Alaska was largely ignored by the U.S. until the mid-1890s when gold was discovered on Birch Creek and in the Yukon Territory of Canada (NPS 2005b). By the 1890s, and with the rush to the Klondike Gold fields, gold exploration took place throughout the country. Strikes were made along the Yukon River, and in 1902 a major strike in the interior resulted in the settlement of Fairbanks (NPS 2005a).

In 1912, Alaska became a U.S. territory. Two years later, construction began on the Alaska Railroad, planned to extend from Seward to Fairbanks. Anchorage was established as a construction camp on the railroad line and thousands of workers poured into the area in 1915. Although the town voted to call itself Alaska City, the federal government refused to change the name from Anchorage (Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development [DCED] 2000).

MILITARY PERIOD (1940 TO PRESENT)

Referred to as "the most strategic place in the world" by Billy Mitchell in 1935, Alaska received a military presence with the construction of Elmendorf Field in June of 1940 (Elmendorf AFB 2006). Although the air facilities retained the name Elmendorf Field, the rest of the installation was redesignated Fort Richardson by the War Department later that same year. The first Air Force unit, the 18th Pursuit Squadron, arrived in 1941, with the 23rd Air Base Group assigned for base support shortly thereafter. Other units arrived as the Japanese threat developed into World War II. The 11th Air Force formed at Elmendorf Field in 1942 (Elmendorf AFB 2006). The field served as the main air logistics center and staging area during the Aleutian Campaign and subsequent air operations in the Kurile Islands of Japan (Air Force 2003b). In 1945, the 11th Air Force was designated the Alaskan Air Command (AAC).

After World War II, the Army moved its operations to a new Fort Richardson site, while the Air Force assumed control of the original Fort Richardson and renamed it Elmendorf AFB in 1948 (Air Force 2003b). Post-war uncertainties led to a build-up of air defense forces in Alaska with the Alaskan NORAD Regional Operations Control Center at Elmendorf serving as the center for air defense operations in Alaska (Air Force 2003b). The next two decades saw a switch from prop-driven fighter (F-51) to a series of jet fighter aircraft (F-



THE P-38 SUPPORTED SHIPPING AND ISLAND DEFENSE DURING WWII. THIS P-38 WAS RESTORED BY BASE PERSONNEL.

80, F-94, F-89, F-102), all of which were utilized as interceptor aircraft for the defense of North America (Elmendorf AFB 2006). Such efforts required the development of new communication systems to coordinate the activities of isolated posts throughout the state.

With six fighter interceptor squadrons, the AAC reached its apex of operations in 1957 with nearly 200 fighter aircraft located at Elmendorf AFB and Ladd AFB. Controlled by an elaborate system of 18 aircraft control and radar warning sites, Elmendorf became known as the “Top Cover for North America,” a motto that was officially adopted by the AAC in 1969 (Elmendorf AFB 2006).

Elmendorf experienced a steady decline through the late 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. Ladd AFB, also part of the AAC, was consigned to the Army in 1961 and renamed Fort Wainwright (Elmendorf AFB 2006). The base received a boost in 1970 when the 43rd Tactical Fighter Squadron relocated to Elmendorf. Along with the activation of the 18th Tactical Fighter Squadron, the AAC now had an air-to-ground capability utilizing the F-4E. In 1975, the AAC was dissolved. Elmendorf began supporting other commands, with an emphasis on military airlift operations (Elmendorf AFB 2006).

In the 1980s, Elmendorf AFB experienced a period of growth and modernization, including the construction of an enhanced Regional Operations Control Center. In the early 1980s, the 18th and 21st Tactical Fighter Squadrons switched aircraft to A-10s and F-15s, respectively. Additionally, the 54th Tactical Fighter Wing was reactivated at Elmendorf in 1987 (Elmendorf AFB 2006). Alaska’s air defense was further augmented with the addition of two E-3As in 1986, and the AAC was reestablished in 1989 under the Air Force’s Pacific Command. With the closure of Clark AFB (due to the expiration of the Philippine lease and the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo), the F-15E Strike Eagle equipped the 90th Tactical Fighter Wing. In addition, the 3rd Wing, and the Pacific Regional Medical Center were moved to Elmendorf in 1991 (Global Security 2006). These changes precipitated the deactivation of the 21st Wing, in keeping with Air Force policy to retain older units during times of force reductions (Elmendorf AFB 2006). Elmendorf continues at a strategic location at the “Top Cover of North America.”

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